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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with socially maladjusted pupils who do not make full use of school opportunities. Through a Philadelphia Board of Education resolution passed on October 30, 1972, approval was given for the offering of social work services to the Charles W. Henry School to help socially maladjusted pupils. At Henry School, the social workers inventoried the concerns expressed by the pupils. The workers helped students bake cookies and cakes, fashion leathercraft, and examine career options. As the students warmed up to the social workers they cogently described problem areas and accepted recommended solutions. Social workers recognized that learning styles vary from student to student--some learn best through auditory and/or visual means, and some learn best in the absence or presence of competition. The social workers helped ameliorate student-police relations and promote intergroup relations. Although the services of the workers were scheduled to terminate the first week in May, the Home and School Executive Board voted to fund the program with its own monies for an additional eight weeks. (Author/RVJ)

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RX For Imaginary Invalids:

Social Workers for Early Teens

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A driver stopped his car to let geese cross a country road. "Blow your horn at em," said the driver's testy companion. "Why?" came the measured reply; "They're going as fast as they'll ever go."

Compelling reasons - social, emotional, and political - are advanced to explain unacceptable pupil behavior. Schools treat unequals unequally to discover solutions. The emergence of the advocacy system has prompted in youth, estranged or alienated from school, a desire to participate in shaping the policies and programs that affect their circumstances. The problem is compounded by the fractured egos of pupils in conflict with themselves or with the establishment and who hold narrow self concepts and aspirational views.

Through a Philadelphia Board of Education resolution passed on October 30, 1972, approval was given for the offering of social work services to the Charles W. Henry School for the purpose of helping "socially and maladjusted pupils make better use of school opportunities." Directed by a social work supervisor from the University of Pennsylvania, two graduate students were assigned to deal with the concerns of seventh and eighth grade students, three days a week, through May 4, 1973. Students could initiate a self-

CG 009 619

referral or be selected for group and/or individual counseling by the teachers or by the social workers.

With training in group process, the dynamics of family, community, and classroom interaction, the social worker is a natural extension of the teacher. A partner in alliance with the school and the home, the social worker interprets the impact of social forces upon institutions, identifying problems, helping to humanize class climate, to focus on school as a life-lab where acquiring competency is possible. Fixing attention on problem solving, the social worker endeavors to facilitate communication between and among those with vested interests in outcomes. In defining issues, he seeks to deepen awareness and sensitivity with a view toward achieving goals. Along the way, the social worker interacts with parents, teachers, students, community leadership, agency personnel, district and central office staff.

At Henry School, having been introduced to six classes, the social workers inventoried the interests expressed by the pupils. In response to a check list used in small "rap" sessions, the workers conducted field trips to examine the workings of the community, conferred with gang workers, agency personnel, and visited area high schools which the students would eventually attend. A resource close to the center of student sensitivity, the workers helped students bake cookies and cakes, fashion leathercraft, examine career options, swim at the local Y, go on picnics, discuss dating etiquette and police action with community representatives.

In an unprecedented episode at the school, after consultation with the social workers and the principal, the students were invited to participate in a faculty meeting where they raised, sometimes to the considerable chagrin of teachers, searching and pointed questions about homework, tests, grading, and grouping. At one unforgettable juncture, the pupils wanted to know the premise underlying the organization of the 7-8 grades. In a vigorously spirited interchange, they posed sharp insights, ventilating their feelings about life at the school, in the neighborhood luncheonette, in the yard, at church, and at home. As the students warmed up to the social workers, they cogently described problem areas and accepted recommended solutions. The pupils cooly fielded objections and displayed an uncommon by controlled openness and candor that belied their years and maturity. For the first time, these young people were working through the passivity syndrome - challenging values - answering questions and questioning answers about alternatives. With considerable skill, they riddled hoary notions subscribed to by educators since Aristotle. The teachers, feeling less defensive, handled the ripostes with equanimity and genuine compassion. At one point the students identified the most important attribute of the social worker as "Being a friend when you (student) need one - he's there when there's a hassle." This discussion was a prelude to other significant meetings that had carry over into school relationships.

For seventy-five to one hundred seventh and eighth graders, the social workers provided lunch period interest activities on a regular basis. The activities included dramatics, puppet making, community service, as well as service to the school. Pupils were motivated to expand their relationships with peers and adults. The social workers convened a lunch committee comprised of two representatives from each of the six homerooms to formulate guidelines governing pupil behavior outside the usual lunch area. Their Memo of Understanding, agreed to under the direction of the social workers, reflects the typical adolescent's rage for order and need for limit-setting; it gives credence to John Gardner's observation - There can be order without freedom, but there can be no freedom without order. The "Laws of the Persians and Medes" included:

1. The lunch area is reserved for seventh and eighth grade students.
2. Although dancing and jumping rope are allowed, baseball is not permitted.
3. Suspended pupils are not to participate during their period of suspension.
4. Fighting and smoking are forbidden.
5. Students must report promptly to class when the bell ends the lunch period. Only the rotating clean-up committees may remain in extra minutes to check the area.
6. All scheduled programs must have rain dates.
7. The use of "bad language" is prohibited.

Pupils provided phonographs, records, were self-directing, and exerted their own peer pressure upon those who would violate the agreement. Their investment of time and effort gave a different dimension to the school experience. Learning resulted in casual experiences and activities. Creative play was seen as a strategy to encourage early formation of small friendship subgroups and to strengthen self-image. As cooperation and group unity increased, members planned group activities and assumed more responsibility. Small groups proved a useful resource to acquire competencies in interpersonal relationships with peers and adults. The potential drop-out, the disruptive learner, the underachiever, the withdrawn and lonely, the isolated and handicapped - all had a chance to find a place.

The social workers organized a cadre of forty-two seventh and eighth grade tutors to work with approximately forty grades one to six children having trouble in subjects. Older pupils having behavior or adjustment problems were assigned to work with the younger children. There were pay-offs at both ends of the continuum. Younger children demonstrated improved skills in math and reading as the older pupils took on responsibility and increased self-esteem in a new role. He who teaches - learns. At a special assembly at the end of the term, the social workers distributed certificates and awards of merit to tutors whose pride said it all. The student-teachers, frequently stage-center, for all the wrong reasons, exulted in the recognition.

(The author has written an article describing a cross-age tutoring project entitled "Wildest Colts Make the Best Horses: Children Helping Children", to be released in the November-December 1974 issue of The National Elementary Principal.)

Visible and accessible to the children, the social workers were in classes, the yards, the office, the auditorium and the gym, in the neighborhood, at faculty, grade level, and Home and School meetings. They continuously provided ego support to children on the cutting edge of disruptive behavior.

Social work recognizes that learning styles vary from student to student: some learn best through auditory and/or visual means - some learn best in the absence or presence of competition: Whatever the mode, school must be an educational sanctuary where risk taking is invited, where the trust quotient nurtures creativity and imagination. School must be a haven where it is safe to fall or fail.

Using project contracts, the social workers proved that rewards help to modify the learner's emphasis from one of I.Q. to "I will." When the contract was not satisfied, built in penalties cancelled the promised outcome. Breaking the trained-seal, instant reqard syndrome, the workers issued points for good behavior and a constructive performance. A given accumulation of points enabled the pupil to choose an activity on Friday. For freedom's sake, the pupil with a brittle personality learned to temper dismay - that patience is the time a seed needs to grow - that pressure can produce a diamond.

Like Job discovering a new affliction, the social worker pointed out the lethal label of tracking and grouping assumptions - that acting out is the result of the student who lives down to the level of expectation set for him. The student becomes what the teacher wants to see. It is this perception impacting on the interaction of the student with all in the learning process that is the point of entry for the talent of the social worker. If the student in trouble is listening to a different drummer, it may be that he is finding his own tempo on his own drums.

The social workers devised a "contact sheet" detailing people involved, purpose of activity, group or individual meetings. The records indicated observable change, increased morale, and had clout on the teaching program. Parents had access to an additional mechanism for dialogue about the school's objectives and to learn about what went on in the school. Interraction with community heightened viz a viz meetings to counsel parents. Potentially incindiary issues were defused. To implement knowledge gained, the social workers helped everyone relate to the schoool and to the community and to interpret the realities of the community to the school staff.

The social workers helped ameliorate student-police relations, promote intergroup relations, stimulate provisions for leisure time activities and student employment in the community.

They triggered consideration of school and interpersonal problems with peers and teachers and energized leadership development in designing creative learning opportunities. They generated discussion about control, conditions that produce rewards and punishments, as well as those factors that perpetuate student careers as malperformers.

Although the services of the workers were scheduled to terminate the first week in May, the Home and School Executive Board, after careful assessment of the program, voted unanimously to fund the program with its own monies from May 7 to June 29, 1973.

Schools are doing much that was exclusively the province of the home, church, or community. As the quality and caliber of life become more complex and demanding, society will arrogate yet more responsibility to the school. Like Ionesco's Rhinocerous, school is growing implacably in the size of its responsibilities threatening to tear the house down. Unless we see the danger to "We have met the enemy and he is us", school will become an even more convenient apparatus to rationalize society's failures. At the outset, all must recognize that the social worker cannot succeed where all others have failed; professional reciprocity must prevail if productive harmony is to evolve.

If the social workers services are to be realized, these operational administrative guidelines will prove instrumental:

1. Give ligitimacy to the role and function of the workers through early oral and written presentations at faculty, assembly and Home and School meetings. Include the use of the social workers in in-service programs for new and veteran staff. Encourage cooperation.

2. Clarify line and staff relationships with respect to the workers place in the school's Table of Organization. Avoid the entanglements of human frailty. Overlapping is inevitable: principal, counseling teacher, school community coordinator, nurse Home and School, attendance office, psychologist, municipal personnel.

3. The social workers does not replace or duplicate; he enhances and supplements services, using special skills and expertise to make activities more meaningful and effective.

4. Meet daily, weekly, or monthly with the worker for routine and/or crisis situations.

5. Provide time for workers to share recommendations, concerns, program ideas, observations, suggestions and reports with staff and community leadership.

6. Social workers should set aside days and hours for individual conferences with parents, teachers, and students. Encourage educated listening-hearing with one's heart and mind.

7. Avoid the cuppling effects of virulent elitism by associating the workers programs with "dumb" or "bad" pupils.

8. Check that all understand the forms used by the social workers.

9. The social worker should be advised of all in-house actions taken on students with whom he is involved.

10. Review all communications from the social workers intended for distribution to the community - questionnaires, notices, surveys, or letters.

11. Orient social workers to the school's programs and activities. Include administrative routines, bulletins, regulations, as well as school laws and teachers' contract. Community make-up and expectations are a vital part of this preparation.

12. Set parameters for the workers in matters relating to sexuality and human development.

13. Social workers should be cautioned against the practice of by-passing appropriate offices - end running decisions without proper consultation.

14. Though the social worker frequently deals with privileged information, the student does not abandon his civil rights as he enters the school. Respect the learner's claim to privacy and confidentiality.

15. Social workers must not be viewed as the students' champion, taking up cudgels against officialdom. Nothing is more destructive to the worker's value than the notion that he is siding with students against the school routine or personnel.

16. All must understand that bulletins, memos and agenda do not alter attitudes. Perceptions are modified with time, effort, and forbearance.

Dr. Matthew W. Costanzo, Philadelphia Superintendent of Schools, has set five priorities for 1974-75 to deal with the city staggering drop-out rate and to treat directly the district's 16 percent daily student absentee rate. Preventive maintenance includes career education, alternative programs, reading,(math), early childhood, special education. The acronym for the five objectives is C.A.R.E.S. and bears the intellectual and emotional signature of the social workers' potential contribution in each of the areas.

With thanks to C.P. Snow, the social worker is one who has the future in the marrow of his bones. He can help to unravel the skein of problems that today's lifestyle of future shock is visiting upon malleable minds. As we are inexorably arrowing our way into a vortex of change, the need for a consortium of services entreats the expertise of the social worker not as an experimental federal or state serendipity but as a legitimate and permanent member of the school's professional staff.